

John. L. (John Louis) Spivak:

An Inventory of His Literary File in the Photography Collection at the Harry Ransom Center

Descriptive Summary

Creator:	Spivak, John L. (John Louis), 1897-1981
Title:	John. L. (John Louis) Spivak Literary File
Dates:	1930-1931
Extent:	1.5 document boxes (146 photographs)
Abstract:	The Literary File of American journalist and author John L. (John Louis) Spivak consists of 146 photographic prints and negatives that primarily depict African American prisoners, their abuse by wardens, and their living conditions in rural Georgia. Spivak took the photographs in 1930 and 1931, and he used them as documentation for and illustrations in his 1932 novel <i>Georgia Nigger</i> .
Call Number:	Photography Collection PH-02721
Language:	English and
Access:	Open for research. Please note: Negatives cannot be accessed without curatorial approval and advance notice, but access prints are available for negatives that were not accompanied by original prints.

Administrative Information

Acquisition:	Internal transfer
Processed by:	Susan McClellan, 2006; Kait Dorsky, 2015; finding aid revised, Mary Alice Harper, 2019
Repository:	Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin

Biographical Sketch

John Louis Spivak was born on June 13, 1897, and grew up in New Haven, Connecticut. After a series of factory jobs, Spivak began his career in journalism as a police reporter for the *New Haven Union*. His antipathy for the patriotic hysteria of the late 1910s, coupled with an interest in socialism, politicized Spivak, who investigated and exposed corruption and venality in American business and government. By 1919, Spivak was working as a freelance reporter for the American Socialist Party's paper, *The Call*, where he covered labor unrest in the West Virginia mines, going so far as to personally ask the White House to investigate the murders of unionizers and the Sacco-Vanzetti murder trial.

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, Spivak travelled around the country and the world investigating corruption and inequality. He successfully proved that a New York police commissioner's "evidence" of labor unions receiving funds from the U.S.S.R. was forged. He also investigated living conditions in Georgia prison camps and chain gangs, which he revealed in his 1932 novel *Georgia Nigger*. This book caused a sensation, and it is credited with curtailing the chain gang system in the South.

In the 1930s, Spivak investigated the rise of fascism, working with several anti-fascist and Jewish groups to expose German and Japanese propagandists and spies. His 1934 book, *Plotting America's Pogroms*, investigated Nazi groups in the United States. He continued his investigations and interviewed members of the anti-Nazi underground in Rome, Vienna, Berlin, Warsaw, and Prague. He published these reports as *Europe Under the Terror* (1936). Spivak also exposed a group of fascist sympathizers who were trying to foment a revolution in Mexico in order to divert American attention from Germany and Japan. His 1940 book, *The Shrine of the Silver Dollar*, led to the downfall of the anti-Semitic broadcaster, Father Charles Coughlin.

Spivak retired from journalism in the early 1960s and published an autobiography, *A Man in His Time*, in 1967. Two years later, he became consumer affairs editor at a Pennsylvania newspaper. There he exposed a corrupt magazine sales scheme which eventually led to a new state consumer protection law.

Spivak died on September 30, 1981, in Philadelphia.

Scope and Contents

The collection consists of photographic prints (957:0108:0001-0081) and negatives (957:0108:0052-0146) by journalist and author John L. (John Louis) Spivak (American, 1897-1981). The negatives were taken during two trips he made to rural Georgia, the first in the fall of 1930, and the second in the fall of 1931. The images primarily depict African American prisoners, their abuse by wardens, and their living conditions. Spivak used the photographs as documentation for and illustrations in his 1932 novel *Georgia Nigger* (New York: Brewer, Warren and Putnam, 1932). While the majority of the

photographs are small in size, approximately nine by twelve centimeters, several enlargements are also included. A few of the photographs have black and white paint applied to either mask or enhance the image, and several show printer's crop marks.

Descriptions in this finding aid are based on Spivak's inscriptions on the photographic print versos, where available. The images are arranged based on their original order, with negatives at the end of the collection.

This file forms a part of the Ransom Center's Literary File photography collection, which is comprised of photographs and albums withdrawn from the libraries and/or papers of literary figures and businesses, and generally include portraits and images taken or collected by and/or of those people and businesses. This collection was internally transferred from the John L. (John Louis) Spivak Collection (MS-03939).

Related Material

Associated manuscript materials, much of it related to *Georgia Nigger*, can be found at the Ransom Center in the John L. (John Louis) Spivak Collection (MS-03939).

Index Terms

People

Williams, J. D. (Prison warden).

Subjects

African American prisoners--Georgia--1930-1940.

Chain gangs--Georgia--1930-1940.

Convict labor--Georgia--1930-1940.

Prison wardens--Georgia--1930-1940.

Prisoners--Abuse of--Georgia--1930-1940.

Prisons--Georgia--1930-1940.

Places

Georgia--Pictorial works--1930-1940.

Document Types

Gelatin silver prints.

Nitrate negatives.

Accession Number: 957:0108:0001 Seminole County, Georgia, warden in front of his house at the convict camp, 1930 or 1931. Gelatin silver print, 25.5 x 20.2 cm. **Container** 1.1

Accession Number: 957:0108:0002 Inside of a convict cage at Camp No. 2, Sumter County chain gang, 24 October 1931. Gelatin silver print, 11.2 x 8.6 cm. **Container** 1.2

Accession Number: 957:0108:0003-0005 Two variant views of wooden convict cages, 1930 or 1931. Gelatin silver prints, 11.6 x 8.9 cm or smaller.

Accession Number: 957:0108:0006 Convict in cage, 1930 or 1931. Gelatin silver print, 11.2 x 8.6 cm.

Accession Number: 957:0108:0007-0008 Two variant images of sick convicts, 24 October 1931. Gelatin silver prints, 11.2 x 8.6 cm or smaller.

Accession Number: 957:0108:0009-0011 Two variant images of bunks in the Seminole, Georgia, convict camp stockade, 1930 or 1931. Gelatin silver prints, 24.9 x 20.5 cm or smaller.

Accession Number: 957:0108:0012-0013 Two variant images of convicts bathing, 1930 or 1931. Gelatin silver prints, 25.5 x 20.5 cm or smaller. **Container** 1.3

Accession Number: 957:0108:0014-0016 Three variant images of convicts chained by the neck and feet to an iron cage, 1930 or 1931. Gelatin silver prints, 11 x 8.5 cm or smaller. **Container** 1.4

Accession Number: 957:0108:0017-0018 Two variant images of convicts in camp, 1930 or 1931. Gelatin silver prints, 12.4 x 11.1 cm or smaller. **Container** 1.5

Accession Number: 957:0108:0019-0021 Three variant images of Georgia chain gang convicts, 1930 or 1931. Gelatin silver prints, 11.1 x 8.6 cm or smaller.

Accession Number: 957:0108:0022 A chained Georgia convict, 1930 or 1931. Gelatin silver print, 11.2 x 8.6 cm.

Accession Number: 957:0108:0023-0024 Two variant images of Georgia convicts at work on a highway, 1930 or 1931. Gelatin silver prints, 11.3 x 8.7 cm or smaller.

Accession Number: 957:0108:0025-0026 Two variant images of Georgia state convicts, 1930 or 1931. Gelatin silver prints, 11.6 x 8.9 cm or smaller.

Accession Number: 957:0108:0027-0028 Two variant images of convicts at work on Georgia highways, 1930 or 1931. Gelatin silver prints, 11.2 x 8.6 cm or smaller.

Accession Number: 957:0108:0029 Machines used to help break land in one of the larger Georgia counties, 1930 or 1931. Gelatin silver print, 11.2 x 8.6 cm.

Accession Number: 957:0108:0030-0031 Two variant images of Georgia state chain gang prisoners working on a highway, 1930 or 1931. Gelatin silver prints, 10.9 x 8.5 cm or smaller.

Accession Number: 957:0108:0032 Convict on horse-drawn cart in field, 1930 or 1931. Gelatin silver print, 11.7 x 8.6 cm.

Accession Number: 957:0108:0033 Truck bed filled with dirt, 1930 or 1931. Gelatin silver print, 11 x 8.5 cm.

Accession Number: 957:0108:0034-0035 Two variant images of Georgia convicts at work on a highway, 1930 or 1931. Gelatin silver prints, 25.5 x 20.3 cm or smaller.

Accession Number: 957:0108:0036 A crew of Seminole County, Georgia, convicts being returned by guards to the stockade after a day on the roads, 1930 or 1931. Gelatin silver print, 11.5 x 8.9 cm.

Container
1.6

Accession Number: 957:0108:0037 Convicts in a stockade, 1930 or 1931. Gelatin silver print, 10.8 x 8.3 cm.

Accession Number: 957:0108:0038 One of the Seminole County, Georgia, chain gang crews returning to the convict camp stockade, 1930 or 1931. Gelatin silver print, 20.5 x 25.5 cm.

Accession Number: 957:0108:0039-0046 Eight variant images of convict-built roads in Georgia, 1930 or 1931. Gelatin silver prints, 25.5 x 20.3 cm or smaller.

Container
1.7

Accession Number: 957:0108:0047-0049 Two variant images of convicts in stocks with wardens, including J. D. Williams of Early County, Georgia, standing by, 1930 or 1931. Gelatin silver prints, 24.9 x 20 cm or smaller.

Container
1.8

Accession Number: 957:0108:0050-0052 Three copies of an image showing warden J. D. Williams of Early County, Georgia, with a chain gang convict locked in stocks who has fainted while hanging suspended by wrists and ankles, 1930 or 1931. Gelatin silver prints, 24.8 x 19.7 cm or smaller.

Accession Number: 957:0108:0053-0054 Two copies of an image of a warden tying a convict to a rack, 1930 or 1931. Gelatin silver prints, 24.8 x 19.4 cm or smaller.

Accession Number: 957:0108:0055 J. D. Williams, warden of Early County, Georgia, pauses in the act of putting a convict on the rack, to pose for picture, 1930 or 1931. Gelatin silver print, 11.2 x 8.5 cm.

Accession Number: 957:0108:0056 Convict on rack, rapidly losing consciousness, while another convict and trustee stand by to untie him when he faints, 1930 or 1931. Gelatin silver print, 11.3 x 8.6 cm.

Accession Number: 957:0108:0057-0059 Three copies of an image showing wardens "stretching" a convict. In this practice, a variation of the medieval rack, a convict is tied to a concrete post, the hands are manacled, and a rope is tied to the manacles and "stretched" around another post, 1930 or 1931. Gelatin silver prints, 24.8 x 19.8 cm or smaller.

Accession Number: 957:0108:0060 Convict chained by hands and feet, 1930 or 1931. Gelatin silver print, 10.8 x 8.5 cm. **Container**
1.9

Accession Number: 957:0108:0061 Convicts watching trussed up fellow prisoner in a Seminole County, Georgia, convict camp stockade, 1930 or 1931. Gelatin silver print, 11.5 x 8.9 cm.

Accession Number: 957:0108:0062 Convict trussed up in Seminole County, Georgia, convict camp stockade, 1930 or 1931. Gelatin silver print, 11.5 x 8.9 cm.

Accession Number: 957:0108:0063 Georgia convict who "sassed" guard trussed up in chains and ropes so that he cannot move, 1930 or 1931. Gelatin silver print, 11.5 x 8.8 cm.

Accession Number: 957:0108:0064-0069 Six variant images of men using hound dogs to sniff for the scent of an escaped convict from State Prison Farm, Milledgeville, Baldwin County, Georgia, 22 October 1931. Gelatin silver prints, 11.2 x 8.7 cm or smaller. **Container**
1.1

Accession Number: 957:0108:0070 People using cattle in farming in Georgia, 1930 or 1931. Gelatin silver print, 11.3 x 8.6 cm.

Accession Number: 957:0108:0071 Cattle and cart, 1930 or 1931. Gelatin silver print, 11.3 x 8.6 cm.

Accession Number: 957:0108:0072-0075 Four variant images of people picking cotton, 1930 or 1931. Gelatin silver prints, 12.6 x 8.7 cm or smaller.

Accession Number: 957:0108:0076 A Georgia man returning from the cotton field, 1930 or 1931. Gelatin silver print, 8.6 x 11.4 cm. **Container**
1.11

Accession Number: 957:0108:0077-0078 Two copies of an image of people bringing a load of cotton to the gin, 1930 or 1931. Gelatin silver prints, 25.5 x 20.5 cm or smaller.

Accession Number: 957:0108:0079 An old Georgia woman emits a cloud of smoke while she poses for a picture, 1930 or 1931. Gelatin silver print, 11.5 x 8.9 cm.

Accession Number: 957:0108:0080 A sharecropper home in south Georgia, 1930 or 1931. Gelatin silver print, 25.5 x 20.3 cm.

Accession Number: 957:0108:0081 View of swamp surrounding body of water, 1930 or 1931. Gelatin silver print, 10.8 x 8.4 cm.

Accession Number: 957:0108:0082 Wooden convict cage, 1930 or 1931. Nitrate negative, 11.5 x 8.6 cm.

Container
Lit File
Nitrate
Neg Box

Accession Number: 957:0108:0083-0084 Negatives for 957:0108:0002-0003, 1930 or 1931. Nitrate negatives, 11.5 x 8.6 cm or smaller.

Accession Number: 957:0108:0085-0086 Two variant images of convicts in cage, 1930 or 1931. Nitrate negatives, 11.6 x 8.6 cm or smaller.

Accession Number: 957:0108:0087-0092 Negatives for 957:0108:0007-0012, 1930 or 1931. Nitrate negatives, 12.1 x 8.5 cm or smaller.

Accession Number: 957:0108:0093 Convict bathing, 1930 or 1931. Nitrate negative, 11.4 x 8.5 cm.

Accession Number: 957:0108:0094 Negative for 957:0108:0014, 1930 or 1931. Nitrate negative, 11.7 x 8.6 cm.

Accession Number: 957:0108:0095 Negative for 957:0108:0016, 1930 or 1931. Nitrate negative, 14.2 x 8.5 cm.

Accession Number: 957:0108:0096 Convicts in uniforms, 1930 or 1931. Nitrate negative, 11.7 x 8.5 cm.

Accession Number: 957:0108:0097-0102 Negatives for 957:0108:0020-0025, 1930 or 1931. Nitrate negatives, 11.7 x 8.5 cm or smaller.

Accession Number: 957:0108:0103-0110 Georgia convicts at work, 1930 or 1931. Nitrate negatives, 11.9 x 8.6 cm or smaller.

Accession Number: 957:0108:0111-0116 Negatives for 957:0108:0036-0043, 1930 or 1931. Nitrate negatives, 11.7 x 8.5 cm or smaller.

Accession Number: 957:0108:0117 Negative for 957:0108:0045, 1930 or 1931. Nitrate negative, 11.8 x 8.6 cm.

Accession Number: 957:0108: 0118 Convict-built road in Georgia, 1930 or 1931. Nitrate negative, 11.7 x 8.5 cm.

Accession Number: 957:0108:0119-0121 Two variant images of convicts in stocks with wardens standing by, 1930 or 1931. Nitrate negatives, 11.5 x 8.5 cm or smaller.

Accession Number: 957:0108:0122 Warden tying convict to rack, 1930 or 1931. Nitrate negative, 11.7 x 8.5 cm.

Accession Number: 957:0108:0123-0124 Negatives for 957:0108:0055-0056, 1930 or 1931. Nitrate negatives, 11.7 x 8.5 cm or smaller.

Accession Number: 957:0108:0125-0128 Negatives for 957:0108:0060-0063, 1930 or 1931. Nitrate negatives, 11.6 x 8.6 cm or smaller.

Accession Number: 957:0108:0129-0132 Four variant images of convicts chained by the hands and feet, 1930 or 1931. Nitrate negatives, 12 x 8.6 cm or smaller.

Accession Number: 957:0108:0133 Men with dogs, 1930 or 1931. Nitrate negative, 11 x 8.5 cm.

Accession Number: 957:0108:0134 Negative for 957:0108:0070, 1930 or 1931. Nitrate negative, 11.4 x 8.6 cm.

Accession Number: 957:0108:0135 Cotton picker in field, 1930 or 1931. Nitrate negative, 11.5 x 8.6 cm.

Accession Number: 957:0108:0136-0137 Negatives for 957:0108:0076-0077, 1930 or 1931. Nitrate negatives, 11.5 x 8.6 cm or smaller.

Accession Number: 957:0108:0138-0139 Two variant images of cotton pickers returning from fields, 1930 or 1931. Nitrate negatives, 11.7 x 8.5 cm or smaller.

Accession Number: 957:0108:0140 Negative for 957:0108:0079, 1930 or 1931. Nitrate negative, 11.6 x 8.6 cm.

Accession Number: 957:0108:0141 Georgia woman in front of house, 1930 or 1931. Nitrate negative, 11.7 x 8.5 cm.

Accession Number: 957:0108:0142 Negative for 957:0108:0080, 1930 or 1931. Nitrate negative, 11.7 x 8.5 cm.

Accession Number: 957:0108:0143 Sharecropper home, 1930 or 1931. Nitrate negative, 11.3 x 8.5 cm.

Accession Number: 957:0108:0144 Negative for 957:0108:0081, 1930 or 1931. Nitrate negative, 11.3 x 8.6 cm.

Accession Number: 957:0108:0145 Men on road, 1930 or 1931. Nitrate negative, 11.5 x 8.5 cm.

Accession Number: 957:0108:0146 House, 1930 or 1931. Nitrate negative, 11.5 x 8.5 cm.